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## MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** JANUARY 12<sup>TH</sup>, 2026

**To:** REGIONAL FOREST AND FIRE CAPACITY GRANTEES  
**FROM:** REGIONAL FOREST AND FIRE CAPACITY STAFF  
**SUBJECT:** PROPOSAL FOR CORRECTION TO GUIDELINES ON TRAVEL COSTS

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### BACKGROUND

The 2022 Regional Forest and Fire Capacity (RFFC) Guidelines contain the following guidance on Travel Costs under the Eligible Costs Section on page 13:

In-state travel for block grantees, subgrantees, and contractors as necessary to fulfill the deliverables of the program.

- Accommodation-related travel costs: maximum reimbursement rates based on county as shown here: <https://hrmanual.calhr.ca.gov/Home/ManualItem/1/2203>, with no option for approval of an “excess lodging rate.”
- Mileage for travel directly related to execution of the scope of work will be reimbursed at the *Reimbursement Rate Per Mile for Personal Vehicle* as shown here: <https://hrmanual.calhr.ca.gov/Home/ManualItem/1/2202>.
- Rental car, train, or airfare will only be reimbursed to attend those meetings outlined in the Administrative Activities section, and then only if it is the reasonable method used to get from one location to the other.
- No other travel-related costs will be reimbursed through this grant program, including per diem.

The 2022 RFFC Guidelines also contain the following guidance on Ineligible Costs as they pertain to Travel Costs, under the Eligible Costs Section on page 15:

Ineligible costs are:

- Costs that are not related to the RFFC Program.
- Costs that occur outside of the grant agreement term.
- Incidentals, tips, and per diems.
- Incentive/participation gifts.
- Out-of-state travel.
- Legal costs and attorney’s fees associated with making or defending legal claims.
- Activities performed and equipment or vehicles purchased that are not identified in the budget/work plan or approved by the Department prior to purchase.



- The following costs associated with community engagement and outreach:
  - Direct cash benefits or subsidies to participants, such as cash subsidies to secure private transportation services
  - Alcoholic refreshments
  - Participant incentives, such as door prizes, which are unrelated to specific community work products
  - General meetings that do not specifically discuss or advance RFFC Program activities and objectives

Travel is intrinsic to meeting RFFC program objectives because grantees are expected to engage in regional coordination efforts. We have found that guidance which restricts grantees' ability to travel for program-related activities therefore limits grantees' ability to meet RFFC program objectives. In particular, existing limitations on meals and incidentals, out-of-state travel, and "excess lodging rates" restrict RFFC grantees' ability to meet regional coordination objectives.

Because **meals and incidentals** are necessary and unavoidable components of a trip, excluding these costs from eligible travel costs has forced grantees to absorb or seek other funding sources to cover the full cost of their program-related trip, or has discouraged them from engaging in program-related travel altogether. The proposed guidance recognizes meals and incidental costs as necessary to travel.

**Out-of-state travel** guidance in the 2022 RFFC Guidelines has prevented grantees from passing through other states even when it is the most efficient, reasonable, and cost-effective method of travel for program-related work. In response to this, a memo issued on October 16, 2025, formally notified RFFC grantees that travel costs incurred out-of-state are eligible for reimbursement in instances where brief out-of-state travel provides the most efficient, reasonable, or cost-effective method to complete in-state travel activities for RFFC-related work. This guidance will remain consistent and will be codified in the 2022 RFFC Guidelines.

The exclusion of an "**excess lodging rate**" puts RFFC grantees in a position where they must limit program-related travel or absorb or seek other funding sources to cover excess lodging costs in instances where there is no available or reasonable lodging at the state maximum reimbursement rates. The proposed guidance recognizes the inherent limitations of the state maximum reimbursement rates, particularly in rural areas with limited lodging options, and offers a pathway for exception.



## IMPLEMENTATION

To address these limitations, and to clarify language related to travel guidance, the Travel Costs guidance in the Eligible Costs Section of the 2022 RFFC Guidelines will be amended as follows:

In-state travel costs may be reimbursed for block grantees, subgrantees, and contractors as necessary to fulfill the deliverables of the program. In accordance with CalHR policy, reimbursement shall be for actual, necessary, and appropriate business and travel expenses incurred during travel lasting 12 hours or more. In instances where travel lasts less than 12 hours but is required by the program, travel expenses may be covered.

- Lodging Accommodation (hotel, AirBnB, hostel, public campground, and similar lodging open to the public)-related travel costs: maximum reimbursement rates based on county and month of travel as shown here: <https://hrmanual.calhr.ca.gov/Home/ManualItem/1/2203>, with no option for approval of an “excess lodging rate.” which may be updated from time to time.
  - o If lodging is not able to be obtained for the maximum reimbursement rates listed above, an “Excess Lodging Rate” of no more than \$350 per night may be granted with prior written approval from DOC for reasonably priced lodging. See definition of ‘Reasonable Cost’ in Section 6 Guidelines. An “Excess Lodging Rate” will not be considered without submittal of three “good faith” comparison quotes for the requested travel dates and a written justification for the requested lodging rate.
  - o Receipts must be submitted for any lodging reimbursement request.
- Mileage for travel directly related to execution of the scope of work will be reimbursed at the *Reimbursement Rate Per Mile for Personal Vehicle* as shown here: <https://www.calhr.ca.gov/2025/01/27/2025-updated-mileage-reimbursement-rates-for-use-of-personal-vehicle-and-private-aircraft/> <https://hrmanual.calhr.ca.gov/Home/ManualItem/1/2202>, which may be updated from time to time.
  - o All mileage reimbursement requests must include back-up documentation, such as mileage log or similar.
- Rental car, train, or airfare will only be reimbursed ~~to attend those meetings outlined in the Administrative Activities section, and then only~~ if it is the reasonable method used to get from one location to the other.
  - o Reimbursement requests for rental car, train, or airfare must include a receipt.
- ~~No other travel-related costs will be reimbursed through this grant program, including per diem. Actual meal and incidental expenses incurred during travel will be reimbursed in accordance with the maximum rates and time frame requirements outlined here: <https://hrmanual.calhr.ca.gov/Home/ManualItem/1/2203>, which may be updated from time to time.~~



- o Reimbursement requests for meals and incidentals must include a receipt.
- No reimbursement for out-of-state travel will be allowed, except in instances where out-of-state travel provides the most efficient, reasonable, and cost-effective method of completing in-state travel. Only in those instances, a grantee, subgrantee, or contractor may incur a reimbursable out-of-state travel expense, notwithstanding the fact that it is located in another state, but only with prior written approval from DOC.

To match the above amended guidance, the Ineligible Costs guidance in the Eligible Costs Section of the 2022 RFFC Guidelines will also be amended as follows:

Ineligible costs are:

- Costs that are not related to the RFFC Program.
- Costs that occur outside of the grant agreement term.
- ~~Incidentals, tips, and per diems.~~
- Incentive/participation gifts.
- Out-of-state travel, except when such travel is the most efficient, reasonable, and cost-effective method of travel for in-state travel purposes, and DOC has pre-approved its use.
- Legal costs and attorney's fees associated with making or defending legal claims.
- Activities performed and equipment or vehicles purchased that are not identified in the budget/work plan or approved by the Department prior to purchase.
- The following costs associated with community engagement and outreach:
  - o Direct cash benefits or subsidies to participants, such as cash subsidies to secure private transportation services
  - o Alcoholic refreshments
  - o Participant incentives, such as door prizes, which are unrelated to specific community work products
  - o General meetings that do not specifically discuss or advance RFFC Program activities and objectives

This memo formally notifies RFFC Grantees of this change, and travel costs incurred on or after this date are eligible for reimbursement based on the updated guidance in this memo. Please reach out to your RFFC Grant Manager if you have any questions on this Memo.

Thank you,

RFFC Staff